



Tahoe National Forest Highlights—2012

Letter from Tom Quinn, Forest Supervisor

To all our Forest visitors, local community members, partners and interested members of the public:

I would like to share the following information with you, highlighting some of our accomplishments from 2012. This list is certainly not all inclusive, as there are more ongoing projects and programs than what we could capture in this brief update.

I have now been Forest Supervisor here on the Tahoe National Forest for 5 years and it has been a rewarding experience. We are fortunate to have such an engaged and talented group of people interested in the National Forest, offering their ideas, chipping in to build trails, and working collaboratively with us as we design new projects. I look forward to getting to know more

of you over the coming year and welcome your thoughts and ideas as to how we can better manage the Tahoe National Forest.

Tom Quinn



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Leaving Waldo Canyon Fire Camp—photo by Andy Achter



Photo from Engine 31

“the strike teams were responsible for saving many homes on the night of June 26 and 27 with their decisive and aggressive actions”

Regional Forester Honor Awards—Emergency Response

Three engine strike teams from the Eldorado/Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, Plumas and Tahoe National Forests were recognized by the Regional Forester as Honor Award recipients recently for their response to the Waldo Canyon Fire near Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Strike Teams 4601C, 3660C and 4660C arrived at the Waldo Canyon Fire on June 26, 2012. Driven by winds up to 65 mph and burning through historically parched fuels, the fire raged into the Mountain Shadows community, spotting extensively and displaying extreme fire behavior creating very challenging conditions. The strike teams, each composed of five engine crews, worked through the night to protect lives and property.

“Comments from Incident Management Team members who were directing the suppression efforts, local agency personnel, and Colorado

Springs residents consistently praised the outstanding efforts of the engine strike teams. They emphasized that the strike teams were responsible for saving many homes on the night of June 26 and 27 with their decisive and aggressive actions and that their efforts directly contributed to the 80% survival rate of residences impacted by the fire,” stated Tahoe Forest Supervisor Tom Quinn who was working on the fire as Agency Administrator. “I am very proud of these men and women and their effectiveness in fighting this fire which eventually burned over 18,200 acres and has been described as one of the most destructive fires in Colorado State history,” continued Quinn.

TNF Strike Team participants - Strike Team Leader: Robert Hilfer
Engine 333 - White Cloud, east of Nevada City: Andy Achter, Captain, Lee Helge-

son, Bill Bakker, Dana Salisbury, Dustin Friedman.

Engine 31 - Camptonville: James Prince, Captain, Matt Mullins, Daniel Sadlo, Christopher Buckbee, Danny Rasmussen.

Engine 42 - TNF Seed Orchard, east of Foresthill: Mike Durocher, Captain, Eric Husmann, Tyler Bosworth, Daniel Manry, David Foster.

Engine 71 - Truckee: Jesse Green, Assigned Captain, Ryan Herrera, Wade Boan, Bryce Dana Boyer, Sabrina Retterer.

Engine 73 - Truckee: Matt Bradford, Assigned Captain, Adam Smith, Richard Herrera III, Gregory Lowdermilk, Jens Schneyder.



Treasured Landscapes – Unforgettable Experiences

The Truckee River watershed (234,000 acres) was selected by the National Forest Foundation (NFF) as one of its 14 Treasured Landscapes – Unforgettable Experiences sites. The goal of NFF for the Truckee River watershed is to assist with the restoration of these lands by strengthening the conservation partnerships between the local communities, other agencies and the Forest Service. The primary objective will be to complete key restoration work by 2017 with ecological, economic and social benefits continuing in perpetuity.

This designation includes National Forest System land in the Lake Tahoe Basin Man-

agement Unit and the Tahoe National Forest.



Releasing Lahontan Cutthroat Trout into the Truckee River

Summer Lightning Fire Response

Last summer, with the critically dry conditions on the east side of the forest, the series of thunderstorms that rolled through Northern California was of substantial concern. During the 3 waves of lightning activity, much of it dry, the Forest Service was successful in keeping the resulting fires on the TNF from growing to campaign-size fires. The forest received over 1500 lightning strikes and responded to

the resulting 65 fires, prioritizing suppression efforts to focus on those with the greatest chance of spreading toward local communities or sensitive watersheds. Due to the extensive amount of lightning and the number of fires throughout Northern California, keeping the fires small was a priority not only for the Tahoe, but also for the Region and the Nation.



Helicopter 514 Dropping Water on Burning Tree — photo by Cam Suarez

FERC Relicensing

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) relicenses hydroelectric facilities every 30-50 years. Four major FERC relicensing projects are currently underway within the Tahoe National Forest, affecting the Middle Fork American River; the South and Middle Yuba and Bear Rivers and several reservoirs including

Bowman, Jackson Meadows and Lake Spaulding ; and the North Yuba River and Bullards Bar Reservoir. The Forest Service has been working collaboratively with power and water agencies, other government agencies, non-profit organizations and others to negotiate stream flows for aquatic species, recreation

opportunities, and wildlife habitat protection measures in these watersheds. These processes have a tremendous potential to enhance forest ecosystems by mitigating adverse effects associated with the operation of dams while also providing a host of ecological, recreational and socio economic benefits.



Multiagency Assessment of North Yuba River below Bullards Bar Reservoir - photo by Amy Lind

Integrated Fuel Reduction and Forest Health Projects Overview

The Tahoe National Forest's integrated vegetation and fuels program includes planning and implementing fuel reduction and forest health projects along with associated forest, watershed, and habitat improvement activities. These projects are key to restoring

the Tahoe National Forest to a more fire resilient condition as they enable fire to be reintroduced into the ecosystem. Many forest stands are so dense that prescribed fire can't be used alone. Reducing ladder and ground fuels via mechanical means along with forest thinning allows the

reintroduction of fire. Thinning of forest stands makes them more resilient to impacts from drought, insects, and disease, especially critical if current climate change trends continue.

See the following paragraphs for specific projects

Last Chance Forest Health Project

Fifteen miles northeast of Foresthill, the Last Chance project, so named for Last Chance Ridge, was initiated in 2006 to improve forest health, watersheds, and wildlife habitat while designing fuel reduction strategies to reduce the intensity of potential wildfire. Goals of this 2,400 acre project include: thinning understory conifer species, primarily white fir; retaining the mid-size to larger trees; providing habitat for sensitive species; maintaining watershed health; reducing fuel loads; enhancing bear-grass populations for Native American cultural traditions; and enhancing hardwoods. Strategically Placed Landscape Area Treatments (SPLAT's) were designed to reduce fuels and modify potential wildfire behavior. The hardwood component was designed to enhance the health of these large oaks by

reducing the competition from the smaller conifers.

Implementation began in 2011, continued in 2012, and will extend into the future. Both ground based and skyline/cable logging systems are being used to thin/remove the trees. To date, the ground-based logging has been completed on 1400 acres. In addition, 280 acres of underburning, 150 acres of machine piles and 50 acres of hand piles have been completed with additional burning planned in future years.

Working in conjunction with the Todd Valley Miwok-Maidu tribe, 74 acres have been planned for bear grass restoration, important for tribal cultural traditions. One acre per year will be burned using unique burning protocols and a special propane burner which is applied direct-

ly to the grass. So far, 2 acres of bear grass have been completed. Burns have also been conducted to improve wildlife habitat on 250 acres. Crews raked the duff and litter layer away from the base of the large trees and snags and altered the lighting process to reduce the potential for damage from the prescribed fire.

The Sierra Nevada Adaptive Management Project (SNAMP) has been incorporated into this project to scientifically review and assess project effectiveness for key elements including the design of the fuel reduction strategies and impacts to the spotted owl. The SNAMP team is composed of University of California, state and federal agencies, and the public.



Last Chance Prescribed Burn—photo by Vic Lyon



Sprouting Bear Grass after Burn — photo by Vic Lyon

Sagehen Forest Health Collaboration Project

North of Truckee, the Sagehen Project has been designed through broad-based stake holder collaboration and aims to:

- Reduce hazardous fuel loadings and modifying landscape-scale wildland fire behavior;
- Maintain and enhancing habitat for American marten and other wildlife species associated with late seral forest habitat;
- Create heterogeneous forest stand conditions that would be expected to

develop under an active fire regime;

- Enhance the ecological role of fire; and
- Restore declining aspen.

Extensive field surveys, remote sensing and GIS analyses combined with peer reviewed science helped formulate strategies to meet project goals.

The Sagehen Project continues to be examined through the Forest Service NEPA process with a decision expected in the winter of 2012/2013 and possible implementation

beginning in 2013.

This collaborative process has included: Sagehen Field Station, University of California Berkeley, Sierra Forest Legacy, Truckee River Watershed Council, California Fish and Game, Pacific Southwest Research Station, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, The Nature Conservancy, Sierra Pacific Industries, and others.

Pendola Fire Restoration and Watershed Analysis

The Pendola Fire started in 1999 and burned over 3,000 acres, creating numerous ecological challenges. For over 10 years, the Yuba River Ranger District has been restoring the area using a variety of methods including: noxious weed treatments; fuel reduction; release and culturing of hardwoods; conifer reforestation and release; and erosion control projects. A new approach was initiated this past year which involves a 448,000 acre landscape level analysis of

the North Yuba River watershed in both the Tahoe and Plumas National Forests. This analysis will assess the differences in current forest conditions vs. expected conditions had fires burned naturally through the area. This analysis will also allow managers to run various scenarios to look at management options to provide the benefits of fire without the risks. Gathering GIS data will continue in 2013 and the simulation runs are expected in 2014.

Elliot Meadow Restoration

Several projects throughout the forest, focus on meadow restoration. Meadows often work like ecological sponges – holding on to water during the spring runoff and slowly releasing it over the summer, sustaining riparian and other ecosystems throughout the dry

seasons. They also provide an increased diversity of plant and animal species. At Elliot Meadow on the American River Ranger District, conifers have been encroaching into the meadow. In 2011 and 2012, these conifers were removed to help maintain the

meadow ecosystem. Additional proposals for this area will include removing additional conifers, re-contouring a ditch to release water across the meadow, restoring two springs, and enhancing the health of the larger oaks and conifers.

Nonnative Invasive Plant Removal

The Tahoe continues to wage war against these undesired plants. A substantial effort is underway to reduce the expansion of nonnative invasive plants across the forest. The top five targeted nonnatives include: yellow star thistle, musk thistle, spotted knapweed, Spanish broom and Scotch broom. These nonnative plants threaten the health of the National Forest by displacing native vegetation, reducing forage values, inhibiting recreation, making

areas more flammable, lowering species diversity and increasing erosion. The TNF is active with state, county and private groups and individuals working with many partners to set joint priorities and join forces to reduce the spread of these nonnatives. This year the TNF treated over 510 acres of nonnatives working jointly with a variety of groups including the Truckee River Watershed Council (Truckee Weed Warriors), Nevada County Fire Safe Council

(Scotch Broom Challenge), the Nevada Placer Weed Management Area Group, the Plumas Sierra Weed Management Area Group, the California Invasive Pest Council to develop best management practices for nonnative plant prevention, and many other groups and individuals. New nonnative species continue to be discovered on TNF system lands highlighting the need for rapid detections and treatment.

Mine Restoration and Clean-Up Projects

The Abandoned Mine Lands program provides reclamation work on abandoned mines in the Tahoe National Forest as well as throughout the western U.S., restoring both legacy and current impacts from mining. Our Abandoned Mine Lands team works in conjunction with the California Department of Conservation, BLM and other national forests to restore ecosystems

adversely affected by mining.

This work includes removing or sequestering hazardous materials including mercury from water sources, enhancing wildlife habitat through placement of bat friendly closures in mine entrances, addressing public safety concerns, and removing trash or abandoned equipment.

This year, ten abandoned mine sites have been remediated on the west side. The work included closing six dangerous mine openings and ecological restoration of two sites on the Yuba River District. Two dangerous mine opening were closed and ecological restoration activities were accomplished at one site on the American River District.



Bat Friendly Grate on an Adit—photo by Mary Rossellen

Relief Hill Dump Clean-up

In a successful partnership, the Forest Service and Cal-Recycle with assistance from Nevada County were able to clean-up the Relief Hill Dump located north of the town of Washington. The project

entailed gathering waste; loading it into bins and boxes; hauling it up the cliff; and disposing of the debris at a legal disposal site. Approximately 75-100 cubic yards of waste were removed and in-

cluded: 4.83 tons of miscellaneous debris, 16 large tractor/trailer tires, 120 passenger vehicle tires, 25 tons of scrap metal, and 4 abandoned autos.



Before Clean-up



During Clean-up



After Clean-up

Sardine Lookout Restoration

Considerable headway was made this year in restoring the lookout on Sardine Peak. The lead paint remediation was completed, old cabinets removed, and the inside and outside painted. Next sum-

mer, the Sierraville District hopes to install new cupboards, flooring, cabinets, and stove, thus completing the restoration. Volunteers, contractors and the Forest Service have been combining

efforts to move this restoration project forward. Once completed, the public will be able to rent this facility similarly to the CalPine Lookout to the north.



Sardine Lookout, 2010

Trail Restoration and Construction

Many trail projects occur each year throughout the Forest. On the Truckee Ranger District, the Hole in the Ground Trail and the Palisades Creek Trail received much needed maintenance thanks to American Conservation Experience, Resource Advisory Committee funding, volunteers, and Forest Service trails leadership. In addition, the Trail Skills College was jointly hosted by the TNF and Pacific Crest Trail Association, providing training for Forest Service

employees, volunteers, and other nonprofits. Student Conservation Association crews working on the PCT completed maintenance on 20+ miles within and adjacent to the Granite Chief Wilderness. Thanks to the cooperative efforts between volunteers, organizations and agencies, the trails on the Truckee District are looking good!

The Yuba River District has been working on extending

the Butcher Ranch Trail for 2 years. It is popular with motorcyclists and mountain bikers. The District's trail crew constructed 1.8 miles of the 2.3 mile single track trail extension with some help from volunteers. The Road Crew also completed a short 4x4 reroute. An additional volunteer effort will also assist with the trail later this year. This project will increase the safety and enjoyment of trail users as



Trail maintenance on the Pacific Crest Trail photo by Jake Dunton



Using a Rock Drill to Build Butcher Ranch Trail Extension—photo by Joe Chavez

Donner Summit Public Utility Special Use Permit

A variety of special uses occur throughout the National Forest. These include organization camps, telephone and transmission lines, and ski areas to name a few. For each of these uses, a Special Use Permit is developed granting authority to use the National Forest System land and identifying various forest protection

measures. The Donner Summit Public Utility District has been operating a sewer treatment plant on the National Forest for many years. To make the system greener and more efficient they have plans to upgrade and expand the facility from a chlorination system to an ultraviolet treatment system. In response, the

Forest Service developed an Environmental Assessment reviewing any potential impacts to the National Forest. This assessment and the subsequent amended Special Use Permit were completed in 2012. The water treatment facility construction is expected to be finalized within the next few years.

New Interpretive Signs for Historic Guard Station at Robinson Flat

As one of the last remaining historic guard stations on the Forest, Robinson Flat Guard Station on the American River Ranger District is located at a popular but remote recreation site. New signs showcas-

ing the 1916 – 1933 era buildings were developed this year and will be installed next summer. The signs highlight the old guard station residence (1916), tack house (1916), and gas house (1933)

and describe the life of the early forest guards. From 1 – 5 employees called this facility home over the years and was last used in 1967.